DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 266 PS 019 835

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TITLE Prekindergarten Curriculum: Implications for State Policy. Policy Issues.
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, WV. Policy and Planning Center.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Jul 89
CONTRACT 400-86-0001
NOTE 55p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Needs; *Government Role; *High Risk Students; *Preschool Education; Program Effectiveness; *Public Schools; *State Government; State Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Policy Makers

ABSTRACT

In their efforts to help children overcome the deleterious influences of such social problems as illiteracy, dropping out, school failure, and poverty, policymakers are turning to early childhood educators. Studies have shown that children in high quality preschool programs exceed expectations in school and society. States and the private sector play an important role in helping low-income families' children participate at the same rate as children from high-income families. Publications for policymakers agree that services for at-risk children should be increased; federal, state, private, and community agencies should collaborate to extend resources; and high quality programs and parent involvement are necessary for success. In regards to curriculum, there is much debate over developmental as opposed to academic programs. Most publications recommend developmental programs, but no one approach is best for all children. State involvement in prekindergarten programs can cover four options: (1) designate a statewide curriculum; (2) give general guidance or guidelines; (3) encourage local program options with strong staff development and technical assistance; or (4) allow local and program options that do not receive additional assistance. Regardless of the type of program, appropriate curriculum development must be a high priority for state policy and action if the program is to succeed. (SAK)

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POLICY ISSUES

Prekindergarten Curriculum: Implications for State Policy

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July 1989

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P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325

Funded by:
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U.S. Department of Education

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This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract number 400-86-0001. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Awareness of demographic and social change has heightened the concern about the nation's children. Since 1980, the number of preschool children has increased; the percentage of those children who are ethnic minorities is also increasing. The well-being of these children is in doubt. At least 25 percent of the nation's four and five year olds live in poverty; more than half of the mothers of three and four year olds work outside the home, and the number of single-parent households is on the rise. What can the future of these children promise in a nation whose teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and infant mortality rates are high, and whose employers complain that the workforce is not prepared for the increasingly complex job market?

Because longitudinal studies of children who attended quality preschool programs show that those children have exceeded expectations in school and society, policymakers are turning to early childhood education to overcome social problems including illiteracy, dropping out, school failure, and poverty.

Prekindergarten Growth and Expansion

Attendance in organized prekindergarten programs is growing, but the enrollment rates of low-income families is not growing as rapidly as the enrollment from affluent families. Accessibility and availability are a problem. High-income families prefer and can afford private programs, whereas Black children are twice as likely to be enrolled in public programs, and Hispanics are least likely to enroll in any preschool.

State involvement. Since 1980, the number of states involved in some type of prekindergarten or early childhood activity has grown from eight to 30. Most growth, however, has taken place in the private sector.

More than 60 percent of the programs in 28 states are half-day; an additional 28 percent have either half- or full-day programs. Only five states permit use of state funds for full working-day care. Different combinations of federal, state, local, and private money support prekindergarten programs. Local and state funds tend to supplement federal funds, which are almost always targeted for special populations.

Diversity. Participation requirements, adult-child ratios, staff qualifications, facilities, equipment, teaching-learning materials, monitoring, and evaluation practices vary greatly, and so does the quality of the program. Prekindergarten programs that segregate children by income level of the parents and special needs of the children add to the diversity.

The Call to Action

Policymakers have been bombarded with professional and political publications that represent the broad public concern. Issues raised include the availability, accessibility, and quality of prekindergarten education. The publications tend to agree on four key areas:

1. State and local education agencies should increase prekindergarten education services to reach the growing number of children at risk.

2. Federal, state, private, and community education agencies should collaborate to extend resources and enhance continuity.

3. Only high-quality programs can achieve the expected benefits.

4. Parent involvement and education should be an integral part of all prekindergarten programs.

Curriculum issues. Genuine philosophical and instructional differences keep the prekindergarten curriculum debate lively and heated. The arguments tend to be polarized: developmental vs. academic curriculum; early childhood vs. elementary philosophy; child- vs. teacher-centered activities; indirect vs. direct instruction; and requiring readiness vs. adapting the program to children's needs.

Longitudinal research shows that quality preschool programs enhance children's school and social competencies, improve children's social and emotional development, and generally have a positive impact if they include several features.

However, caution is suggested for policymakers who expect similar successes from any preschool program. These highly publicized success stories come from small, well-funded, carefully controlled, and well-staffed programs.

Based on the research, it is safe to conclude that what children learn depends on program emphasis. If the program emphasizes academics, that is what children learn. If the program emphasizes social development and independence, that is what children learn. While high-quality early education programs can improve the ability of low-income children to succeed in school and life, no single length or type of preschool experience is optimal for all children.

After considering the research, professional and political groups tend to support the goal-oriented, developmentally appropriate curriculum. Their reports emphasize the use of a variety of approaches and the desire to meet children's individual needs.

Assessment of students and evaluation of programs are major professional and political accountability issues. These issues are extremely complex, ranging from ethical considerations about eligibility to statistical characteristics of tests and research designs.

For curriculum guidance, however, assessments should use a combination of formal and informal methods, such as observing children, interviewing children, collecting and studying children's work and play products, interviewing parents and others who know the children, studying health and other records, and observing children as they function in a group.

Program evaluation informs curricular planning, but it also affects funding decisions. Decisionmakers want facts and information about results that do not always coincide with the information that persons working with young children and their families are able to provide. In their search for accountability, policymakers should seek broader data than standardized tests can supply. New programs especially need time before they can show results. Evaluating program effects calls for a longitudinal study.

The states' role. States that are contemplating curriculum policies for prekindergarten programs have at least four options. They can:

- designate a statewide curriculum,

- give general guidance or provide guidelines,
- encourage local program option with strong staff development and technical assistance, or
- allow local and program option without the provision of additional assistance.

Beyond official policies, states have a wide range of options available for helping local programs to develop and implement appropriate prekindergarten curriculum.

Implications for State Policy and Action

If prekindergarten programs are to fulfill their educational, social, and individual development commitment to society, families, and children, appropriate curriculum development must be a high priority for the 1990s. Education decisionmakers can be active in several areas:

- Convene representative groups of citizens to guide states and their agencies in deciding what should be taught and how.
- Foster cooperation among agencies that work with young children and their families.
- Provide funding that not only supports the structural and administrative elements, but also curriculum development, curriculum guides and training materials, technical assistance, and staff development.
- Support an integrated curriculum, curricular flexibility, and continuity from one level to another.
- Provide assessment and evaluation guidelines to local programs so that appropriate and equitable procedures are used.
- Encourage and support parent involvement and education with resources and training for staff who work with parents.

THE NEED TO CARE FOR OUR CHILDREN

The discontinuities, gaps, and overlaps in many children's care, nurture, and education are hindering our society's efforts to develop and educate its children to be productive citizens (Committee for Economic Development, 1987). In 1987 and 1988, several notable publications reported, advised, and predicted an increasing role for the states and for public schools in caring for our children.

The reasons for this national concern and the call for increased educational services are many, varied, and interrelated. To show their complexity, we have grouped them into four categories: demographic, social, prekindergarten attendance, and educational. Indicators listed under each are not exhaustive, but establish that a trend is forming and that a concern exists. Substantiation and statistics are available from sources listed in the References and Further Readings.

Demographic Indicators

- From 1980 to 1986, the number of children five years old and younger increased by 10.9 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, cited in Beach, 1987).

- The size and characteristics of groups of people affected by prekindergarten education in the United States are changing. The percentage of ethnic minorities in the population is growing, not so much because of an increase in minority fertility rates, but because of a decline in the fertility rate of whites (Duckett, 1988). Many youngsters from ethnic minority groups are considered at risk because of poverty, language and cultural differences, and lower levels of family education.

- Twenty-five percent (25%) of today's four and five year olds live in poverty. One in six lives in a family where neither parent has a job (Children's Defense Fund, 1987).

- Fifty percent (50%) of all children born out of wedlock are born to teenage mothers, most of them poor, poorly nourished, and not ready to be parents (Duckett, 1988).

- Many women are delaying childbearing until after age 30. Career-oriented and likely to reenter the workforce as soon as possible after childbirth, they are demanding more and better child care and early education (Lewis, 1985).

Social Indicators

- The continuing influx of women into the labor force has changed the conditions in which young children are reared. Fifty nine percent (59%) of the mothers of three and four year olds are employed outside the home (Mitchell, 1987; Zigler, 1987).

- The decline of the traditional family unit and the rising number of single-parent households have changed the family conditions for large numbers of children. Twenty percent (20%) of all American children now live in homes without fathers (Bennett, 1987).

- There is realization that our country can no longer afford to have great numbers of its children fail in school and the workforce.

- There is a long-standing practice of the larger society sharing responsibility for social problems and concerns, and of the public's perception that schools should help solve social problems.

- Public, private, business, voluntary, and community resources and organizations are being expected to cooperate and coordinate the delivery of services, in the face of dwindling public funds for many essential social services.

Prekindergarten Attendance Indicators

- Prekindergarten attendance in organized programs is growing. The number of three and four year olds enrolled in preschool nearly doubled between 1970 and 1986, going from 1.5 to 2.8 million. Enrollments for these two age groups are expected to surpass 3.5 million by 1993 (Zill, 1988). Much of the growth of preschool programs was in the private sector (Pendleton, 1986).

- The higher the family income and education level of the head of the household, the greater the use of preschool programs.

Increasing income also increases the likelihood of enrollment in private preschools (Pendleton, 1986; Zill, 1988; Balasubramaniam & Turnbull, 1988).

- Preschool enrollment of children from low-income families is not increasing as rapidly as the number from affluent families (Pendleton, 1986).

- Preschool enrollment rates for three and four year olds are not greatly different for Blacks and whites (43% vs. 39%). However, Blacks are twice as likely as whites to be enrolled in public programs (Pendleton 1986; Balasubramaniam & Turnbull, 1988). Hispanic three and four year olds are less likely to be enrolled in preschool programs than either Blacks or whites (Current Population Survey, cited in Balasubramaniam & Turnbill, 1988).

- About two-thirds of the 28 states that fund preschool programs target services to children from low-income families, those who lack skills in school readiness or English language, or children with other special needs (Marx & Seligson, 1988).

Education Indicators

- The wealth of research evidence that quality preschool programs can help children succeed in school has led many groups to turn to early childhood education to overcome educational problems of illiteracy, dropouts, and low achievement in school.

- Education reforms that demand higher standards, increased accountability, and learning more at younger ages may not work for very young children, especially those without adequate preparation (National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 1988).

- Problems and controversies surround the issues of early testing, placement, and retention of children (Shepard & Smith, 1986). The discussions are fueled by a trend in upper-income families to hold children out of kindergarten a year to give them a competitive edge.

- More and more children entering preschool care literally create a new and younger education unit--one without established norms for what shall be learned when.

- Distinctions among care and nurture and education are blurring as younger children are in group settings for longer

periods of time (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 1988).

- An enormous amount of information is now available that indicates how much children learn before they start to school, and the importance of that learning to later functioning.

THE EXPANSION, GROWTH, AND DIVERSITY IN PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

The demographic, social, preschool attendance, and larger education trends have led to the growth in numbers and size of prekindergarten programs. This growth has been accomplished with a bewildering array of funding, sponsorship, purposes, and target groups (Marx & Seligson, 1988; CCSSO, 1988). However, legislation and activity in the states make even these recent studies out-of-date almost as soon as they are published.

Expansion and Growth

State-funded programs have grown rapidly since 1980, when only eight states had passed legislation or provided state revenues for prekindergarten programs (Marx & Seligson, 1988). The latest estimate is that 30 of the 50 states are involved in some type of prekindergarten or early childhood activity involving public schools (Schultz, 1988). More than 60 percent of the various prekindergarten programs reported by 28 states are half-day; an additional 28 percent may have either half- or full-day programs. As of August 1987, only five states (Vermont, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Florida, and Illinois) permitted children to be served for the full working day. Only five states provide prekindergartens for children who are not at risk (Marx & Seligson, 1988).

Some local education agencies fully fund prekindergarten programs; others supplement them. These range from large urban programs serving thousands of children in cities such as Philadelphia and New York to isolated rural districts with one classroom. Local funds frequently supplement federal funds, which are almost always targeted for special need groups of children and parents. Such programs include Head Start, Chapter 1, Title XX, special services for the handicapped, or some combination of these. As with state and federal programs, most locally funded programs are for children at risk. Local community groups, private agencies, county and city human resource agencies, and others often provide local services and collaborate with each other.

The fastest growing segment of prekindergarten education is in the private sector, however, with programs run by religious institutions, independent schools, parent cooperatives, hospitals, large corporations, small private companies, colleges and universities, community groups, mental health agencies, employers for their employees, and others. Some are primarily for child care, but many are not. Those that do provide full-day care often emphasize the quality of their preschool or child development program. Parents with relatively high incomes pay most of the cost. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of four year olds whose families have annual incomes of $35,000 or more are in preschool--primarily <u>privately</u> funded. Fewer than 33 percent of four year olds whose families earn less than $10,000 attend preschool--primarily <u>publicly</u> funded (Marx & Seligson, 1988). Many children, regardless of income, attend no preschool program, but are cared for and educated in a home--their own,

relatives', friends', or others'--until they start kindergarten or first grade.

Prekindergarten Diversity

The enormous diversity in prekindergarten programs is in sharp contrast to the K-12 educational system. Some of these differences are created by statutes and regulations; others emerge from tradition. Programs differ in their funding sources and level; restrictions on participation; class size; adult-child ratio; teacher and administrator qualifications; services provided to children and families; facilities, equipment, and materials requirements or expectations; parent involvement and education; and monitoring and evaluation. All affect program quality and curriculum issues.

Prekindergarten programs that segregate children by income level of the parents and special needs of the children contribute to the diversity. Home language, race and ethnic background, and educational level of the parents--the factors that target children for special prekindergarten services--work against integration of children of all backgrounds and against the social goals of a good preschool program.

Finally, because a large number of children attend no preschool program at all, entering-kindergarten and first-grade students differ widely in their "readiness for school." All of the sources of diversity create controversy over early testing, retention, and the practice of sending an eligible kindergarten child to preschool instead.

A CALL TO ACTION FOR POLICYMAKERS

Landmark reports and position papers in education react to and report on changes, mark a turning point in public thinking, and act as catalysts to accelerate trends already underway; they are indicative of concern and often predictive of future action. In the past two years, a number of reports that speak to policymakers have called for states and public schools to become more involved in the care, nuture, and education of young children. These papers include:

- three reports from the National Governors' Association--The First Sixty Months: A Handbook of Promising Prevention Programs for Children 0-5 Years of Age, and Focus on the First Sixty Months--The Next Steps: A Guide to Implementation, both released in 1987, and America in Transition: Report of the Task Force on Children (1989);

- Right From the Start: The Report of the National Association of the State Boards of Education Task Force on Early Childhood Education (1988), calling for a variety of changes in early childhood policies;

- a year-long review of early childhood and family education in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Guam by the Council of Chief State School Officers, resulting in three publications--Early Childhood and Family Education: Foundations for Success (1988), A Guide for State Action: Early Childhood and Family Education (1988), and State Profiles: Early Childhood and Parent Education and Related Services (1988);

- the National Conference of State Legislatures' Child Care and Early Childhood Education Policy: A Legislator's Guide (1989);

- Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged, a statement by the influential Committee for Economic Development (1987), calling for an economic investment in early childhood education;

- The Public School Early Childhood Study: The State Survey (1988), conducted by the Bank Street College of Education, which made available information on activities of public

school prekindergarten programs collected by a state survey, district surveys, and case studies;

- the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Resource Guide to Public School Early Childhood Programs (1988), a part of the association's ongoing study of early childhood education;

- the National Black Child Development Institute's publication Safeguards: Guidelines for Establishing Programs for Four-Year-Olds in the Public Schools (1988); and

- an expanded edition of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age Eight (1987), which approached near record sales.

The position papers, research compilations, policy statements, surveys, conferences, task forces, and study groups that led to the issuing of these and other reports represent broad public concern and response to the role of the states in making available, with public funds and under public school auspices, prekindergarten education.

While the findings and recommendations of these reports vary, consensus is found on four key issues:

1) State and local education agencies should increase delivery of prekindergarten education, especially to the ever-growing number of children considered at risk.

2) Federal, state, private, and community education agencies should collaborate to extend resources and enhance continuity from one setting to another.

3) Programs must be high quality to achieve expected short- and long-range benefits. A high-quality program offers cognitive/academic activities within the context of a full child development curriculum, addressing social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth.

4) Parent involvement and education should be an integral part of all programs. A quality program views parents as partners.

The questions of the 1990s are now being formulated. It's time for policymakers to wrestle with issues of program participation and delivery, agency collaboration and responsibility, and funding. The California Task Force on School Readiness 1988 report uses the familiar hide-and-seek refrain to challenge us to action--Here They Come: Ready or Not!

CURRICULUM ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Without question, establishing publicly-funded quality prekindergarten programs and encouraging cooperation and collaboration among all groups who are involved in similar efforts for children and families are high priorities on the education and service agendas of many states. But, a most pressing issue remains: What is the appropriate state role in deciding what shall be taught and how?

As it addresses the question, this paper limits its focus to the year before kindergarten and upon that portion of the program designated as prekindergarten or preschool. These programs are different from before and after school care, full-day child care, parent and family programs, and the variety of other programs for children and families that public schools sponsor and operate. However, the issues and suggestions discussed here have relevance for programs for three year olds, kindergartners, and first graders, since what goes on with one age group influences what happens with another.

With claims for long- and short-range benefits of prekindergarten programs influencing public policy, one might expect agreement about an

appropriate curriculum that would result in the desired outcomes. Such is not the case. Genuine philosophical and instructional differences keep the debates about curriculum lively and heated.

The Curriculum Debate

The discussions surrounding what should be taught and how are usually posed as either/or decisions, or one position versus another. People pursue these discussions using different terms; several examples can be cited.

Developmental vs. academic. A developmental curriculm is described as one that fosters all areas of a child's growth, while being responsive and appropriate for each child's individual development. An academic curriculum is thought of as one emphasizing narrowly conceived school readiness skills focusing on letters, numbers, colors, shapes, location, instructional language, and other skills using worksheets, drill, and paper-and-pencil tasks.

Early childhood vs. elementary approach. The ideal early childhood program is characterized as developmental, incorporating play, self-expression, and children's drive to discover and learn on their own. The elementary school approach is often characterized as teacher-centered, focusing on content and skills rather than all areas of children's development.

Child-selected vs. teacher-selected activities and tasks. In a child-selected program, children choose what activities they want to do, as opposed to having the teacher select and assign activities.

Child-centered vs. teacher-centered. The child's interests and concerns are the starting point for instruction in a child-centered

program, as opposed to the goals and activities of the teacher and the school.

Indirect vs. direct instruction. In a program using indirect instruction, children play, work with materials and each other, and discover for themselves many of the things they are to learn, as opposed to being instructed by the teacher.

Readiness testing vs. school adaptation to children's needs. This controversy revolves around the complex issues of school entrance age; retention; readiness; accelerated curriculum in prekindergarten, kindergarten and first grade; developmental and academic assessment; and the role of tests and testing in early childhood.

Most of these controversies are about instructional practices, rather than content, although some--such as the developmental vs. academic--have implications for content. In addition to these controversies, individuals and professional organizations debate recent developments in child-rearing and early education.

Elkind (1981) repeatedly points out that our entire society--child care centers and schools included--is pressuring many children for accelerated learning and performance beyond their developmental capabilities. Reports by others caution that well-intentioned attempts to help children succeed in school through appropriate "developmental" placement actually increase the trend to acceleration of the academic curriculum for young children (Shepard & Smith, 1986; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education [NAECS/SDE], 1987).

At the same time that some children are pushed too hard, many receive less support than they need to develop their potential. A proper balance that recognizes what we know about early learning needs to be found (Caldwell, 1988).

Research Findings

Research may help us deal with the concerns and controversies. Much of the research base for publicly funded prekindergartens has come from the longitudinal studies begun in the 1960s and 1970s.

Successful programs. Reviews of programs that consistently demonstrated positive impact show that they had uniformly high-quality pedagogy, including (a) a high adult-child ratio, (b) emphasis on language development, (c) proper sequencing of learning activities, (d) opportunities for teachers or students to choose from varied materials, (e) gradual increase in independence, (f) reinforcement of positive behavior, and (g) extensive parental involvement (Caldwell, 1987).

Quality preschool experiences can enhance school and social competencies and emotional and social development (Balasubramaniam & Turnbull, 1988). Examples of the effects of quality preschool experiences in these areas are listed below.

Effects of Quality Preschool Experience

School and Social Competencies	Social and Emotional Development
task persistence and completion	cooperativeness
attentiveness in class	sociability and assertiveness
ability to work independently	self-esteem
ability to follow directions	self-confidence
resistance to distractions	self-expectations
better use of time	motivation to learn and achieve
ability to cooperate with peers	maturity of moral judgment

Although the positive findings of the early research cannot be ignored, appropriate cautions must be observed if we look to them for guidance:

- All the studies were on children considered at risk, or having special needs.
- In most studies, sample sizes were quite small.
- The most highly publicized results came from small, well-funded, carefully controlled programs with expert, highly educated teachers and supervisors. Whether similar results can be achieved on a large scale is not yet known.
- Most programs of the 60s and early 70s were developed as teachers and researchers struggled to find the most effective content and methods for the populations they served.
- Identifying in retrospect the curriculum elements in early programs that may have made a difference in children's later performance is elusive, to say the least. Programs and personnel changed from year to year. Program differences that were supposed to exist were hard to detect (Seifert, 1969). Written curriculum guides sometimes came years after basic research was done.
- No definitive empirical studies of the effects of major approaches to preschool curricula exist (Karweit, 1987).

Children learn what they are taught. Given the limitations and cautions of available research, it is safe to conclude that what children learn depends on program emphasis. If the program emphasizes academics, that is what the children learn. If the program emphasizes social development and independence, that is what the children learn. For example, researchers studying all-day child care found that in centers where staff expressed concerns for cognitive development, children made greater gains on the Preschool Inventory--one of two comparison measures used. In centers where the emphasis was on groups of children rather than on individual development, children had lower gains on the Peabody

Picture Vocabulary Test (Ruopp, et al, 1979). In the quasi-experimental Head Start Planned Variation and Follow Through studies, which contrasted different types of approaches, children made gains on developmental aspects that the program emphasized.

While high-quality early education programs can in some way improve the ability of low-income children to meet the future requirements of their schools, no particular length or type of preschool experience is optimal for all children (Lazar & Darlington, 1978).

Total reliance on the extremes of any approach is not tenable. For example, a good developmental program could not possibly omit basic academic readiness as a part of intellectual and social development. In addition, some children may need more emphasis on some aspects of development than others. Almost all children considered educationally at risk need much language development.

Teachers of young children of widely diverse backgrounds and varying developmental levels need to have a wide repertoire of teaching strategies and approaches to help young children learn appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions. What is needed is a sense of balance and proportion, and the ability to select the appropriate strategy to enable this child to master this learning at this time.

Parent involvement and education. Research from many successful programs has established that parent involvement and education should be an important component of any prekindergarten program. Research comes from programs such as the Appalachia Educational Laboratory's Home-Oriented Preschool Education (HOPE), where home-based learning was a

primary aspect of the program, to center-based programs with home and parent involvement less central, but still present (Gotts 1987; Lazar & Darlington, 1978).

Parent involvement is used to describe a wide variety of activities that range from casual attendance at school functions to intensive efforts to help parents become better teachers of their children. Definitive knowledge about what type of involvement works best with different kinds of schools, communities, cultural groups, teachers, families, and children is not available. We do know that parents of young children are easier to involve than parents of older children. We also know that active parent involvement requires administrative, school, and teacher effort; that few teachers and administrators receive training in working with parents; and that teachers who organized the frequent use of parent involvement were able to get good results from all parents, not just those who were traditionally thought to be helpful to teachers and to children (Epstein, 1987).

Prekindergarten programs should be able to design the types of parent involvement and education that will work best for their population. Programs with a high percentage of both parents working out of the home may have quite different parent programs than those with few parents working out of the home. A close-knit rural community may have a different need and approach than an urban center. In all cases, however, the overall goal will be the same: to help the family in its efforts to make the home be supportive of child and family development, including enabling parents to help their children become better learners (Epstein, 1987).

Professional Recommendations

Leading professional organizations support the use of a goal-oriented, developmentally appropriate curriculum that enhances all aspects of a child's development through a wide variety of instructional strategies.

Program components. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) says, "The implication for policymakers is that no one approach or program type is best; children learn best through a variety of approaches that are chosen to meet their individual needs" (1988, p. 107). Further, effective prekindergarten programs have in common the following components:

- small-group, total-group, and individual activities;
- both teacher-directed and child-initiated activities;
- time each day for skills groups based on children's abilities; and
- language development opportunities.

Both NASBE and CCSSO call for curriculum and teaching that is "developmentally appropriate"--following the National Association for the Education of Young Children's concept of practices that are based on knowledge of the typical development of children within a particular age range, yet sensitive to individual variations. In addition, NASBE says,

> "We need to develop appropriate goals for early childhood programs that will (a) provide children with a wide range of experiences, (b) attend to all key aspects of child development, and (c) support effective and appropriate teaching and classroom environments" (1988, pp. 10-11).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), recognizing that its description of developmentally appropriate

practices does not specify curriculum goals and content, is undertaking a project with the NAECS/SDE to develop a guide of "developmentally appropriate curriculum." Finally, this same national association of state department early childhood specialists, in a widely circulated position paper, calls for resistance to "pressure for acceleration of narrowly-focused 'academic' curricula" (NAECS/SDE, 1987, p. 3).

Assessment and evaluation. The November 1988 statement of the Council of Chief State School Officers says that quality programs require evaluations, "both of programs and the progress of individual children, that are based on developmental goals and reflective of the uniqueness of early childhood education" (p. 8).

Such a call to action demands that state and local programs, professional organizations, teachers, administrators, and researchers address and begin to resolve the many controversies that now revolve around the whole issue of assessment and evaluation. These controversies can be grouped into three areas: (1) initial identification and screening of children into or out of programs; (2) on-going assessment of children's progress for curriculum guidance; and (3) program evaluation. The issues involved are extremely complex, ranging from ethical considerations about eligibility to statistical characteristics of certain tests and research designs. Add the uncertainties and difficulties of determining what very young children know and can do, and the advice from all sources is to proceed with caution (Meisels, 1987; NAEYC, 1988; Peck, McCaig, & Sapp 1988; Shepard & Smith, 1986).

Unless prekindergarten is open to all children, programs need some way of deciding who is eligible. Sometimes socioeconomic information such as income, number of children in the family, or educational level of the parents is used. Referrals from other sources are also common. But often, some type of assessment instrument, screening procedure, or test is used to determine eligibility. Whether such tests are used to screen youngsters into or out of special programs, they must be used with great caution and in conjunction with information from other sources (Peck, McCaig, & Sapp, 1988).

The California School Readiness Task Force, through an extensive public planning process, quickly found that preschool and readiness could not be treated separately from other levels of education, and defined expectations for children finishing kindergarten as the abilities to (a) use language for complex communication; (b) recognize and use opportunities for learning through language, reading, and the arts; (c) use problem-solving strategies; (d) solve meaningful mathematical problems; (e) play individually and with peers and function as a member of a group; (f) demonstrate self-control and self-discipline; (g) sustain interest in an activity and listen to adults and peers; (h) be intrinsically motivated (curious about and challenged by the world); and (i) develop fine and gross motor skills and coordination (California Department of Education, 1988). Such goals might be equally appropriate for prekindergarten since they are quite broad, basic, and achievable.

Used primarily for curriculum guidance, assessments should use a combination of formal and informal methods, such as observing children,

interviewing children, collecting and studying children's work and play products, interviewing parents and others who know the child, studying health and other records, and studying children as they function in a particular group. Information from all these sources, collected at different times, in different activities, and by different people will give a much better assessment of what a child knows and can do than any test or battery of tests (Almy, Monighan, Scales, & Van Hoorn, Jr., 1984).

What young children have learned is difficult to capture. No single assessment of a child's development measures all aspects that are important to later learning such as motivation, initiative, persistence, love of learning, and self-concept as a learner. The uses and abuses of tests and other methods of assessing and measuring young children's learning have filled many pages of recent literature. To guide state policy, state leaders must be familiar with the current best knowledge, the limitations, and the potential of a well-done assessments and evaluations.

Program evaluation is usually used to make decisions about needed changes or revisions in programs being developed (formative evaluation), or decisions about the results or impact of a particular program, often involving level of funding, or even continuation of funding (summative evaluation). Decisionmakers' need for facts and results do not always coincide with the information that people working with young children and their families are able to provide, especially if programs are just starting. New programs need start-up time and formative evaluation before they can be expected to show results. Even under the best of circumstances, broader data than standardized tests can supply, and a

longitudinal look for possible program impacts should be considered (Weinberg & Moore, 1975; NAEYC, 1988).

STATE APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM GUIDANCE IN PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

Studies of state agency involvement in prekindergarten education typically do not focus on curriculum. For example, the Public School Early Childhood Study conducted by the Bank Street College of Education concentrated on program structure, funding, and administration. It found that of the 28 states funding prekindergarten, one-half mandate developmental programs that include health, social service, and parent participation. The remaining states either have no curricular requirements, as is true in the majority of permissive legislation states, or focus on cognitive curriculum (Marx & Seligson, 1988).

If states are contemplating becoming involved in curriculum for prekindergarten programs, what options do they have and what options have been tried? Available information suggests that there is enormous variation in the amount of curriculum guidance given local programs; in the amount of training, technical assistance, and monitoring to establish and maintain quality; and in the relationship of the lead state agency and its personnel to local programs.

Reviews of what states have done, and telephone and personal interviews with representatives of selected states, suggest that states can (a) designate statewide curriculum; (b) give general guidance, such as recommending that curriculum be developmental; (c) encourage local and program option with strong staff development and technical assistance;

and (d) allow local and program option without the provision of additional assistance. Some state agency staff provide assistance in the absence of official policy.

Designated Statewide Curriculum

In South Carolina, "a cognitively oriented prekindergarten curriculum is mandated and developmentally appropriate activities using NAEYC standards are recommended

> ....The High Scope model is encouraged and statewide training in the model has been available. Programs must use an education program specified by the state board of education or an alternative program approved by the board" (Marx & Seligson, 1988, p. 177).

In Washington, a mandated developmental curriculum includes cognitive-intellectual skills, gross and fine motor skills, health and nutrition, and pre-academic skills (Marx & Seligson, 1988).

General Guidance

In Maryland, prekindergarten programs must conform to general state guidelines. State standards call for a curriculum, approved by the local board of education, that supports the development of the total child and provides for planned, differentiated, and sequential learning. Michigan prekindergarten programs must comply with state board of education guidelines. State personnel monitor programs and provide technical assistance, primarily in the area of curriculum development (Marx & Seligson, 1988). Other types of general guidance include: published state curriculum guides, approved training, technical assistance and staff development, and informal persuasion.

Local Option With Staff Development and Technical Assistance

States have much power to influence curriculum when they control training and technical assistance. In New York, local developmentally-oriented curriculum is supported by the state education department through consultants, regional training, and technical assistance meetings and program monitoring (Marx & Seligson, 1988). Regional resource centers were available for technical assistance when prekindergarten programs were just starting.

Local Option

Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, and Maine are examples of states where the prekindergarten curriculum is reported to be locally determined. An evaluation of the first year of three pilot programs in Delaware found that the curricula used in the programs varied in their focus. Interestingly, the report recommended joint inservice training and technical assistance to increase expertise and to reduce the isolation of the programs (Marx & Seligson, 1988). This suggests that although local autonomy may seem desirable, programs may benefit from curriculum guidance. Curriculum development is not quickly or easily done.

Variations in state curriculum guidance stem from traditional relationships of the lead state agency to the local districts and programs, size and resources of local programs, the specifics of the legislation, rules and regulations related to establishing the programs, the demand for early program evaluation, the amount of funding available to provide guidance and staff development, the size of the program, and

its relative maturity. New programs may need more guidance than long-established ones. Because of time constraints, pilot programs that must produce results may turn to an established approach.

Strategies Beyond Official Policies

Beyond official policies, state agency personnel have developed many ways to help promote desirable curriculum practices. Examples in several areas can be cited.

Materials Development

- Develop and disseminate curriculum guides or position papers.
- Identify, develop, or repackage and update appropriate training materials and modules for local use.
- Develop a bibliography of available curriculum and staff development material.
- Make state publications available for purchase by anyone.

Awareness Activities

- Develop and circulate memos, news briefs, newsletters, short booklets, or reprints on relevant, high-interest topics.
- Provide administrators with what they need to know to understand and support prekindergarten programs.
- Make presentations at state, regional, or local meetings of professional organizations.
- Develop public awareness campaigns for parents and the public.
- Make presentations at parent organizations and through public service spots on radio and television.

Training Activities

- Offer state or district training and technical assistance on identified local needs.
- Develop and publicize summer institutes.
- Conduct personal visits and explanations, or training and education to translate the state positions and guides into action.
- Provide staff development for all administrators, teachers, aides, and other personnel.

Collaborative Efforts

- Provide continuing education or college credit for local staff development.
- Extend state training resources by seeking the active help and support of the early childhood teacher education programs.
- Encourage interagency training with other child care and education agencies and units, such as Head Start, Chapter 1, special education, and others.
- Investigate what can be done in conjunction with private or non-profit programs.

In summary, states have a wide range of options available to them for helping local programs develop and implement appropriate prekindergarten curriculum. Some are official and formal; others are not. Probably all will be needed as prekindergartens continue to expand.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE POLICY AND ACTION

If prekindergarten programs are to fulfill their educational, social, and individual development commitment to society, families, and children, appropriate curriculum development must be a high priority in the 1990s. For successful implementation of a large-scale

prekindergarten program for children, policymakers will want to consider taking action in several areas.

Systematic Public Planning Process

Goals and content cannot be derived solely from knowledge of child development, but must also consider the expectations of the larger society--parents, future employers, school personnel, and citizens who fund the programs, as well as child development specialists and researachers. A representative group of people should be brought together to guide states and other agencies in deciding what should be taught and how. Local and state education agencies, Head Start, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, and other groups have done this, providing an enormous background of available information.

The California School Readiness Task Force went through such a planning process. Testimony, disagreements, need statements, and public hearings built consensus and understanding and resulted in documents that had widespread support. Guidelines were broad and flexible enough to allow for community and group variation, yet specific enough to make expected outcomes clear. Collaborative planning can also address concerns about curriculum continuity and transitions from one level to another.

Interagency Collaboration and Cooperation

Prekindergarten programs must take a comprehensive view of child care, nurture, and education. Many current regulations and traditions inhibit and fragment essential cooperation and collaboration in

developing and delivering appropriate programs. States have traditionally had little influence over or cooperation with private or independent schools and centers and the many nonstate agencies that can help young children and their families. In addition, state-funded agencies have a long-standing tradition of noncollaboration among themselves--a tradition that is difficult to overcome. Policymakers need to foster cooperation.

Adequate Funding

When state policymakers authorize prekindergarten programs, they should also fund development of curriculum guides, training materials, technical assistance, and other appropriate staff development and support activities. State funding should support the structural and administrative elements essential to the implementation of quality education and development. These include such things as appropriate space, equipment, and supplies; small class size; high adult-to-child ratio; salaries for adequately prepared classroom personnel; time for planning; and parent involvement and education.

Curriculum Development

Policymakers should support an integrated curriculum that fosters all aspects of child development; helps children learn worthwhile knowledge and skills, including such things as motivation, persistence, responsibility, how to work with others, and a love of learning; and recognizes the wide variety of ways children learn, including through play. Policy should encourage curricular flexibility in meeting

individual and group needs, cultural and ethnic differences, and the enormous diversity represented in prekindergarten and other early childhood programs. Curriculum development efforts should recognize that the prekindergarten year is part of a larger educational process encompassing programs for younger and older children. Guides should provide for appropriate differentiation of curriculum and for continuity from one level to the next.

Assessment of Programs and Evaluation of Children

States should provide assessment and evaluation guidance to local programs so that appropriate and equitable procedures are used. Assessment and evaluation should be recognized as an integral part of curriculum implementation, as well as essential for state and local decisionmaking. At least some measures and procedures should be comparable statewide, so that information can be pooled to provide a better basis for decisionmaking.

Although state decisionmakers are understandably eager for evaluation results, programs need time to get established before being expected to produce definitive data. Start-up time should be built in.

Parent Involvement and Education

State policy should strongly encourage and support parent involvement and education with appropriate resources and training for teachers, administrators, and other personnel who will be working with parents. Many strategies for involving parents are appropriate and should be used, including public awareness campaigns on what parents can

do to foster their child's development. Research suggests that there should be some emphasis on enabling parents to help their children become better leaners.

Conclusions

Deciding what should be taught in prekindergarten programs and how it should be taught is a complex process, which lacks the long traditions that benefit other levels of schooling. If the goals of prekindergarten education are to be attained, appropriate time, energy, and money will need to be spent on curriculum decisions for children of this age and development.

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APPENDIX

KENTUCKY, TENNESSEE, VIRGINIA, AND WEST VIRGINIA PRE-K PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The following summary of information from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia has been compiled from telephone interviews with state department of education personnel, brochures and information sent by the states, the Bank Street State Survey (Marx & Seligson, 1987), and Prekindergarten Programs in Public Schools: A National and State Review (Trostle & Merrill, 1986). Information on Head Start, child care, special education, and collaborative projects is not included.

Kentucky

In July 1986, the Kentucky legislature created an Office of Early Childhood Education and Development within the Governor's office, an Interagency Council, and an Interagency Advisory Committee to address early childhood education and development issues across the state. The three offices coordinated a study of early childhood needs in Kentucky, and, in December 1987, jointly issued a report outlining a course of action for the state.

Also funded as a pilot project in 1986 was the Parent and Child Education (PACE) program. The program has three purposes: (1) to improve parents' basic skills and attitudes toward education, (2) to improve children's learning skills, and (3) to improve parents' child care skills. The program is for parents without high school diplomas who have a three- or four-year-old child. The parent attends adult education classes three days a week, while the child attends a preschool program.

Parents also work with their children in the preschool setting and help their children learn.

The goal of the program's preschool curriculum is to increase the developmental skills of children, so that they are better prepared for academic success. PACE staff selected the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation's cognitively-oriented curriculum, because it is compatible with program goals and capable of delivering training and staff development. For the parent education component of the program, state coordinators chose the Minnesota Family-Oriented Preschool Program. Its major strategy for increasing children's potential for academic success is to train parents in child development and education.

PACE, which currently serves parents and children in 18 classrooms in 12 Kentucky school districts, was funded by the 1988 Kentucky General Assembly for two more years. In November 1988, the PACE program was awarded a $100,000 prize for innovation in state government by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and the Ford Foundation. The program serves as a model for similar efforts in other states and for the Even Start legislation passed by Congress in 1988.

Tennessee

Tennessee's involvement in services and programs for prekindergarten children originates with a three-year parent involvement program, funded by the legislature in 1985. The program was developed in four phases. During the first two phases, eight operating programs were identified and four National Diffusion Network programs were established to serve as model programs for others interested in beginning parent involvement

efforts. During phase three, travel grants were provided to teams of staff from districts wishing to visit one or more of the 12 model programs. Sixty-eight districts received seed grants in phase four of the program to establish similar efforts across the state. Three of the programs--the Caldwell School in the Metro/Nashville District, Dyer County Schools, and Athens City Schools--specifically involved parents of prekindergarten children.

The department's FY 89 initiative expands the focus of its efforts to family and community involvement. Nine of the model programs established in phases one and two of the earlier effort continue to receive some state support. A new thrust targets school systems wanting to develop parenting skills programs for families of at-risk preschool children (3-5 years of age). Forty-two systems received funding in FY 89. The department also conducts two statewide conferences each year to share information about operating programs and to stimulate the formation of similar efforts. A community involvement conference was sponsored in the fall 1988, with the family involvement session scheduled for spring 1989.

Virginia

In 1987, the Virginia Department of Education began the Program for Four Year Olds, a pilot early childhood project serving at-risk children. Eleven school divisions are operating pilot efforts, using a combination of Chapter 1 and local funds. The pilots operate as either a center- or home-based model. Both models include classroom experience and parent-involvement, but with differing emphases. Classroom

instruction in both models is based on the High/Scope curriculum, supplemented by the department to provide additional emphasis on language. The parent-training component of the home-based model was developed by the department of education based on the current research on school success. The school divisions use a variety of activities to involve parents in the programs. Some use instructional packets, others use home visits by teachers, group meetings with parents, and classroom visits by parents.

To prepare for the pilot programs, the Virginia Department of Education provided three types of training:

1. 3-day training in the High/Scope approach;
2. 1 1/2- to 2-day training in oral language development; and
3. 1 1/2-day training in classroom management.

Somewhat shorter training opportunities were provided in the summer 1988 and spring 1989. State department of education personnel anticipate that the pilot programs will continue for one more year with plans to follow the progress of the participants through elementary school. The legislature has funded a research project to conduct annual evaluations of the pilots, as well as to study the long-term effects of the early intervention pilot programs and the ways that learning and social outcomes vary with the quality of the program.

Other action in the area of early care and education is the 1988 General Assembly's creation of a new agency to coordinate the state's day care and early childhood services. Establishment of the Virginia Council on Child Day Care and Early Childhood programs appears to be one of the

most ambitious efforts by a state to promote collaboration in the provision of early services.

The panel will plan, coordinate, and evaluate all child day care and early childhood development programs for at-risk four year olds. State officials expressed hope that such programs would be phased in by 1995. The council will coordinate day care, Head Start, and preschool programs operated by a range of public and private agencies. The council will promote programs that offer developmentally appropriate activities for young children.

West Virginia

Although West Virginia does not have specific prekindergarten legislation, the state is involved in a variety of preschool education efforts. The state school code allows local boards to establish prekindergarten programs, and the state department of education has a line-item appropriation that provides funds to a variety of prekindergarten programs.

Perhaps the most significant state action regarding curriculum and program quality results from legislation that requires the state to establish standards for prekindergarten programs, both public and private. The Educational Improvement Program establishes a self-assessment process to help districts identify areas needing improvement. Criteria call for prekindergarten teachers; appropriate staff-child ratios; therapists and counselors to support classroom staff; and sufficient materials, supplies and equipment to provide for children's developmental learning. In addition, districts must have a

system in place to monitor each child's mastery of state and local learning objectives. Programs are advised to use pre- and posttests to evaluate student progress, and standardized development tests to plan learning activities. A written plan is required to evaluate program effectiveness. The department of education also has developed a Child Assessment System in six areas of child development. To help staff implement activities to meet identified needs, curriculum guides for each of the six areas accompany the assessment package. These materials are available to public schools, private preschools, and child care centers. Parent guides in each developmental area are also available.

New legislation just enacted in a 1988 special session provides for screening of prekindergarten children. The intent of the law is to aid parents in early identification of potential problems or advanced abilities their children may have in the areas of language, sight, hearing, motor development, hand-eye coordination, and psycho-social or physical development. The screening, which must be requested by parents or guardians through county boards of education, may be done once each year. Under the same legislation (SB 14), school districts are authorized to use school facilities for the purpose of child care--extended day care for school-age children, as well as care of preschoolers. Lawmakers are hopeful that this new authority will be used to provide child care for children of school employees and others in the community.

Early in 1989, newly elected Governor Gaston Caperton announced the formation of a Task Force on Children, Youth, and Families. The group

will "develop investment strategies to deal with the environmental conditions that result in our young people's inability to take advantage of their educational opportunities."

The task force, cochaired by the governor's wife and a leading coal executive, will examine issues and needs in four areas: child care and family security, early education, kids in jeopardy, and health and economics. Its report is due in September 1989.

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